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AUTHOR(S):

AKAHORI, Masayuki

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Towards a Dynamic View of Sufism and Saint Veneration in Islam: An Anthropological Approach

AKAHORI Masayuki*

Based on the fieldwork I conducted in San Francisco in the U.S.A., and the city of Tanta and the Western Desert of Egypt, this paper deals with popular aspects of Sufism that might seem trivial compared to the faith's esoteric, mystical dimension. However, in order to grasp Sufism in general, it is important to understand how ordinary Sufis — who are not highly educated and do not long for spiritual transcendence — view their faith. In addition, I present examples of people performing rituals that resemble the Sufi tradition of *dhikr* (a devotional act for remembering God) without any connection to Sufism itself. These examples show that while Sufism and saint veneration in Islam are essentially distinct religious phenomena, they also influence each other in diverse ways and various social and historical contexts.

I. Tonaga's Theory: A Three-Axis Framework of Sufism

The starting point is a three-axis framework of Sufism proposed by Tonaga [2006] in which he says that three main elements can be seen throughout the faith. These components are mysticism, ethics, and popular beliefs (See Figure 1)¹, whose various combinations resulted in all Sufi beliefs and practices.

Ethics are not considered part of the mystical experience, but moral virtues are usually preconditions for following Sufi paths; therefore, ethics are integral to Sufism. Scholars have not yet explored Sufism's ethics in depth; however, this could be done through interviews with contemporary Sufi disciples, or by examining materials and documents widely read by ordinary Sufis.

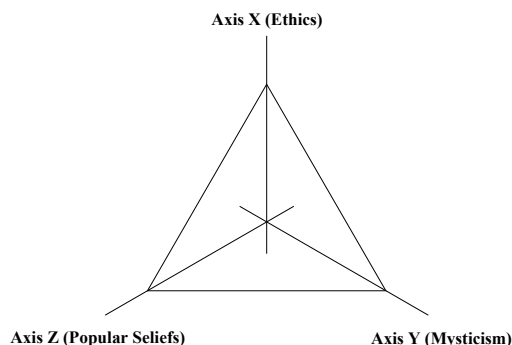


Figure 1 [Tonaga 2006: 11, partially modified]

A typical tradition within Axis Z is saint veneration. Scholars have widely observed that Sufi followers revere figures within their orders whom they consider extraordinary and whom they honor as saints. An order's eponymous Sufi master, that Sufi's famous successors,

* Professor, Faculty of Global Studies, Sophia University, JAPAN

¹ Tonaga uses the term “popular cult” for Axis Z, but I use “popular beliefs” in this paper as a regular term in anthropology.

and even living followers who represent the order often become subjects of veneration. If enthusiastic non-disciples who revere Sufi saints are taken into account, then popular beliefs and Sufi rituals frequently spread beyond the framework of Sufi organizations.

While it is critical to consider popular beliefs and practices as part of Sufism, this third axis is not a precondition for either mysticism or ethics. Respect for masters might encourage Sufi disciples to become more virtuous and help them endure hardship, but such respect is not required to pray to saints. The axis of “popular beliefs” is not integral, but rather grafted onto Sufism. Examples collected during my fieldwork will explain the reasoning behind this assertion.

II. Sidi Muḥammad al-‘Awwām of the Western Desert of Egypt

The first example is Sidi Muḥammad al-‘Awwām of Egypt’s Western Desert, the most widely known saint in the region. I began my career as a field worker in that sparsely populated region in 1988, and my study focused deeply on Sidi al-‘Awwām.

The Western Desert, which extends westward from the Nile to the Libyan border, was originally home to Bedouins. They were living a nomadic life with tents, camels, sheep, and goats in the coastal corridor along the Mediterranean Sea. However, due to increased immigration from the Nile Valley, particularly after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Bedouins gradually became a minority within the population [Drejer 1985: 107–110]. There is no exact statistical data, but an officer of the Matrouh (Maṭrūḥ) Governorate, which occupies the northern half of the Western Desert, told me in 2007 that Bedouins comprised about one third of the total population of 350,000.²

Nowadays, most Bedouins have abandoned the nomadic lifestyle and live in towns and villages, but their traditional tribal system still has considerable influence on their social and political lives in that area [Akahori 1994], as do their popular beliefs and practices around saint veneration [Akahori 2002].

During fieldwork, I collected many different hagiographic tales about Sidi Muḥammad al-‘Awwām. All of them are based on the story of a middle-aged man who drifted ashore on the Mediterranean coast, presumably after his ship had sunk; he was given the name Muḥammad al-‘Awwām and enshrined in the place where Masjīd al-‘Awwām (a *masjid* is a mosque) is now located in Marsa Matrouh (Marsā Maṭrūḥ), the capital city of the Governorate. He is also known as a saint due to the miracle that happened to his body after death. Hagiographic tales say that when the people tried to move his tomb to another place, his body flew into the air and returned to the tomb’s original location [Akahori 2007: 33–34].

² Based on e-mail correspondence from November 2008. Statistical yearbooks of the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS) show that the estimated population of the Governorate was 337,399 in 2007 and 427,573 in 2014 [CAPMAS 2009: 43; 2014: 5].

In another article I wrote [Akahori 2004: 80; 2007: 36], I emphasized that Sidi al-‘Awwām was a complete stranger among the Bedouins; it is not known whether he self-identified as a Muslim. Nevertheless, he was enshrined and has been honored in the Bedouin community. The fact that he was given a name very common to male Muslims suggests that local people accepted him as a foreigner and a saint, in addition to the title “al-‘Awwām,” which Bedouins interpret as “drifter” or “complete stranger from the sea.” It is true that most enshrined Islamic saints in the Western Desert are not of Bedouin origin; rather, they came to the area as travelers, hermits, merchants, or pilgrims and settled among the Bedouins. In this sense, the saints in the Western Desert are primarily outsiders who brought something precious — knowledge, commodities, or holy grace — to the Bedouins. Sidi al-‘Awwām is an extreme example of saintliness among the Bedouins.

However, the imam the government appointed to lead al-‘Awwām Mosque had a different view of Sidi al-‘Awwām.³ The imam came from Alexandria in 1991 and began insisting that Sidi al-‘Awwām was a member of a scholarly Alexandria family, and that he was also a pious devotee of the Qādirīya. According to the imam’s narratives, Sidi al-‘Awwām left his home in Alexandria to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but died when his ship was wrecked. The Bedouins did not accept this hagiographic tale in the 1990s, and those who believed it were mainly immigrants from the Nile Valley; thus, the imam’s version must have been a recent invention. The imam believed that proof of piety was necessary in order to consider Sidi al-‘Awwām a genuine saint; he tried to depict Sidi al-‘Awwām as the type of saint he was familiar with: one from an urban area, intellectual, pious, and in most cases, Sufi. The coexistence of two distinct hagiographic tales shows how different groups of venerated have unique stories depending on their understanding of Islamic saints.

The situation has changed further in the first decade and a half of the 21st century. I visited the Western Desert in 2011 after five years away, and found that even the Bedouins widely accepted that Sidi al-‘Awwām was a scholar and Sufi. This alteration in his origin is significant because from my perspective, he is a good example of how even a non-Muslim could become a saint among the Bedouins simply for being an outsider. He was still a foreigner to the Bedouins, but by being accepted as a scholar and Sufi of Alexandrian origin between 2005 and 2012, he became a Sufi saint in local eyes.

Although Sidi al-‘Awwām is believed to be a scholar and a Sufi, Bedouins are not members of the Qādirīya. Even now, the Bedouins consider Sidi al-‘Awwām a saint primarily because a miracle happened to him, not because he was a great mystic. For them, being Sufi is only part of his origin, but his new label as a scholar and a Sufi has brought a small but significant change to the terminology used. Some Bedouins today use *shaykh* to refer to Sidi al-‘Awwām, which they never used before the 1990s. Among the Bedouins of the Western

3 See Akahori’s paper [2007: 32–35] for details.

Desert, *shaykh* usually denotes tribal elders [Obermeyer 1968: 124].⁴ In the case of Sidi al-‘Awwām, the term is clearly understood as an honorary title for pious and devout persons. This kind of usage is common in the Nile Valley, but was rare in the time of my fieldwork in the Western Desert in 1990s. Moreover, it is remarkable that some Bedouins came to understand the term “Sufi” during the six years between 2005 and 2011. Before 2005, I had never heard terms such as “Sufi” or *taṣawwuf* used in conversation with the Bedouins. Now, when asked, they affirm that Sidi al-‘Awwām was a Sufi, even though it is not certain whether they understand those terms.

The case of Sidi al-‘Awwām was introduced not only to show how a non-Sufi saint became Sufi, but also to show that being Sufi is only one of his attributes, and does not play a large role in his veneration. It is possible that many people who honor Sufi saints do not care much about the teachings of Sufism, even if they are members of Sufi *ṭarīqas*.

III. Venerators of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī of Tanta

Those who esteem Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī of Tanta provide a clear example of saint veneration among ordinary people. It is common knowledge among students of Sufism that Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī is a globally known saint and founded the *ṭarīqa* called al-Aḥmadīya or al-Badawīya. He was probably born in Fez, Morocco in 1199/1200, lived in Mekka, became a Sufi in Iraq, moved to Tanta in 1236/37, and died there in 1276 [Vollers and Littman 1960: 280].⁵ His *ṭarīqa*, the Aḥmadīya, gained a large number of followers and sympathizers, and has been called one of the four major *ṭarīqas* in Egypt.⁶ His shrine, Tanta, is the capital of the Gharbīya Governorate and located in the central Nile Delta. It is the tenth largest city in Egypt with a population of roughly 450,000.⁷ The city draws hundreds of thousands of venerators and onlookers each October during celebrations (*mawlid*, pl. *mawālīd*) that commemorate Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī [cf. Mayeur-Jaouen 2004].⁸ During a week of the festival, the Mosque of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī, where the saint is enshrined, is full of people day and night, without a square foot left unoccupied.

Even when a celebration is not happening, the Mosque of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī has many visitors, some of whom are local residents coming for daily prayers, but many others come for a special religious occasion to them. After praying in the mosque, they go to the

4 Sometimes, *shaykh* is used when addressing any adult Bedouin. Such usage is common in the Arabic dialect of eastern Libya.

5 A new article by C. Mayeur-Jaouen for the 3rd edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* will soon be published. See her other works [1994; 2004 et al.] for details.

6 Another three *ṭarīqas* are al-Dusūqīya, al-Rifā‘īya, and al-Shādhilīya.

7 CAPMAS [2009: 44] indicates the total population of the city as 421,076, which is the official result of the 2006 census.

8 The festival of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī is held according to the Coptic solar calendar, unlike most other saints’ holidays, which follow the Hijri lunar calendar.

room that houses the tomb of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī. They touch it, take commemorative photographs,⁹ stay beside the tomb for hours, chat with one another, and ask the saint to facilitate *shafā'* (mediation), a divine process that delivers their prayers to God.

I visited this mosque several times in 2011¹⁰ and interviewed 59 people who had visited (*ziyāra* means “visit” in Arabic) the tomb of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī. In most cases, interviews occurred in the room of the saint’s tomb, the courtyard of the mosque, or nearby teashops, with each interview lasting half an hour on average. Sometimes interviewees kindly invited me to their homes or hotels, and those interviews lasted as long as 4 or 5 hours.

It was striking that the interviewees did not mention anything about Sidi Aḥmad Badawī’s Sufi teachings or the *ṭarīqa* named after him. The exceptions were 9 people who were members of the Aḥmadīya, which Section 5 of this paper will mention. Fifty interviewees always referred to the saint by the title “Sidi” or simply *shaykh*.¹¹ In this case, *shaykh* means a distinguished religious person,¹² but the term is not necessarily combined with Sufism. In fact, interviewees only used “Sufi” to refer to Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī when I specifically asked them to use it. They spoke of his great knowledge and intellect, various miracles that happened to him, and the huge amount of grace (*baraka*) he received from God, but they never referred to his Sufi teachings or the Aḥmadīya’s activities.

They explained their attitude towards Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī as *ḥubb* (love)¹³ or *iḥtirām* (respect). No one expressed their attitude towards the saint as *‘ibāda* (worship), and they clearly knew that only God should be worshipped. However, when they supplicated to God (*du‘ā'*), asking for things such as improved health, success in jobs and studies, finding spouses, or healing illnesses, they were not as sure whether they were praying to God or to the saint. Some relatively well-educated interviewees said the saint mediates their wishes and God grants them, while a few said they wanted Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī to grant their desires. However, most seemed to simultaneously ask God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the saint to hear their wishes, without distinguishing which one would answer. It was not important to them who responded to their prayers, but rather whether their prayers were answered at all.

In this context, the fact that Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī is a Sufi does not necessarily invite venerated to follow a saint’s mystical path. They do not generally seem to have an interest

⁹ People especially love photographing a black stone that they believe contains footprints of the Prophet Muḥammad. The stone is put in the glazed case in the wall of the saint’s room. See Wheeler’s description [2006: 79] about this holy relic.

¹⁰ I conducted this research when I stayed in Egypt from September to October 2011, and again in December 2011.

¹¹ Some other terms such as *al-sayyid* (the master) and *al-quṭb* (the axis) were used, but not as frequently.

¹² In the Nile Delta, *shaykh* sometimes refers to village elders in other contexts.

¹³ The term *maḥabba*, which means “passionate love” in daily use, and specifically devotees’ love for God in the context of Sufism, was not mentioned in the interviews.

in achieving spiritual transcendence. They do not consider mysticism as something that they themselves should tackle. Rather, they identify it as a powerful source of holy grace (*baraka*) that the saint holds and which they cannot acquire directly. They stand outside the circle of Sufi trainees and are connected to the Sufi organization by honoring its founder as a saint. In this sense, the attitudes of Sufi practitioners and saint venerators are contradictory. The former group believes that mysticism can be understood and mastered, but the latter thinks it should remain incomprehensible and beyond their direct grasp; otherwise, from their view, mysticism loses the ability to bring grace to regular people.

IV. Followers of the Ni‘matullāhīya in San Francisco and the Aḥmadiya in Tanta

The aforementioned point is further clarified by examining the followers of the Ni‘matullāhīya in San Francisco.

The exact number of Muslims residing in the United States is unclear,¹⁴ but California is probably the state with the most Muslims, where those who follow Islam and their religious practices have become part of daily life, at least in urban areas. Muslim Americans usually gather at “Islamic centers” which include a mosque, religious classes, a shop selling religious goods, and other facilities, but there are also Sufi lodges (normally independent of Islamic centers) where believers who converted from Christianity can go to seek a sense of spirituality that they did not find in their original faith.

The Ni‘matullāhīya’s lodge in San Francisco was founded in the 1990s. It is small and located in the city’s suburban residential area.¹⁵ The building was first an ordinary two-floor house, and looks like it even now when seen from the outside. In this small home hedged by shrubs with beautiful blossoms, members use the large living room for multiple purposes including praying, training, and dining, while they use the smaller, upstairs rooms for meditating, the office of the lodge leader (*shaykh*), and his personal use.

Unfortunately when I visited the lodge in March 2011, the *shaykh* was absent from San Francisco for a few days, but I was able to interview 10 members. They said the total number of members was less than 30, but membership did not seem rigidly fixed, and regular attendees of the weekly meetings at the lodge were told it had between 10 and 15 members. Two of the 10 members I interviewed belonged to second and third generations of Iranian immigrants, and another 8 had converted from Christianity. The history of the Ni‘matullāhīya — which dates back to 14th century Iran and spread across Europe, West Africa and North America after the Iranian Revolution [Algar 1995: 45–47] — corresponded with the ethnic backgrounds of the members. Six were in their 20s, three were in their 30s, and another was

14 The Pew Research Center [2011: 20] estimates 2.75 million, while Muslim organizations in the United States often state more than 7 million [Ba-Yunus and Kone 2004: 300–307].

15 As far as I know, there is another, much larger lodge of the Ni‘matullāhīya in San Francisco, but I was unable to contact its members during my fieldwork in 2011.

in his 50s; he was working as a *khalīfa*, a representative of the lodge leader. There were 2 female members in their 20s; the other 8 were male.

Although the mainstream form of the Ni‘matullāhīya in the United States was headed by Javad Nurbakhsh, and after his death in 2008 by his son and successor Alireza Nurbakhsh [Algar 1995: 47],¹⁶ this lodge did not have an official relationship with those leaders;¹⁷ instead, it had active relationships with other spiritual movements that have been prevalent in California since the 1970s such as Zen, Yoga, Kabala, and also American indigenous beliefs and rituals. The lodge’s monthly newspapers were full of information about the events of these different religions, and Hindu and Buddhist symbols could be found on the walls of the lodge.¹⁸

“Sufi” and “Sufism” were used naturally in the interviews, unlike in Tanta and the Western Desert. In the Western Desert, the Bedouins were either unfamiliar with these terms or saw them as recently imported ideas, while in Tanta, venerators of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī understood them, but did not consider them as words used on a daily basis. Only the members of the Ni‘matullāhīya, who are mostly Westerners, understood “Sufi” and “Sufism” as abstract ideas like I did, and could explain the situations in which the terms were used.

It is noteworthy that they used “holy person” to mean the founder of the order, Shāh Ni‘matullā Valī (1329/30 or 1330/31–1430/01) [Algar 1995: 45]. They avoided using “saint” and explained that in the United States, it is mainly a Catholic concept. They said that “veneration” is an improper term and that “respect” should be used to express their attitude towards the founder. They agreed that Shāh Ni‘matullā Valī acts as a guide and intermediary between people and God, but denied that they asked for *shafā’* (mentioned earlier). They clearly distinguished between Sufi training and saint veneration.

The case of nine Sufi members of the Aḥmadīya in Tanta is a mix of these two attitudes. They regularly attend *dhikr* meetings in a tent in front of the Mosque of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī or in their villages, and admitted that they follow the path of their order’s founder. However, they rarely use “Sufi” or “Sufism” and say it is very natural to ask the saint for *shafā’*.

They answered questions about the reasons for participating in *dhikr* suggestively. A few interviewees expressed the goal of *dhikr* as effacement (*fanā’*), while others said it was a form of training (*tadrīb*) on the Sufi path. However, others explained that they attended mostly for enjoyment (*farah*), or merely out of a traditional sense of duty (*taqlīd*). One of the most common reasons for attending *dhikr* was to remember (*dhikrā*) God, the Prophet Muḥammad, and Sidi al-Badawī.

16 At the moment, there is not much objective information about Alireza Nurbakhsh. See the website of the Nimatullahi Order [http://www.nimatullahi.org].

17 The lodge is not listed on the website mentioned in Footnote 16.

18 For example, the Buddhist Diamond Sutra, written in Chinese characters, was placed on the altar next to the “*miḥrāb*” (niche) indicating the direction of Mecca.

These answers show that the members of the Aḥmadīya revere the saint and are also Sufi disciples. Some might think they are not “pure” Sufi devotees compared to followers of the Ni‘matullāhīya. However, it should be noted that there is no individual word for “veneration” in Arabic. I used English to communicate with the members of the Ni‘matullāhīya, and the distinction between “worship” and “veneration” was meaningful for both the interviewees and myself. I used Arabic in Tanta to converse with the members of the Aḥmadīya, who used *‘ibāda* to mean worshipping God; however, they lacked a definite word for “veneration” and used terms such as *ḥubb* (love) or *iḥtirām* (respect) to mean “veneration” in English. The followers of the Ni‘matullāhīya in San Francisco could clearly distinguish between “veneration” and “respect,” but such a contrast did not work in Arabic, as seen in the context of the Aḥmadīya’s followers. Thus, there is a gap in the perception of concepts. In the former case, the difference between “veneration” and “respect” is easy to grasp, but in the latter, the meaning of “respect” — whether honoring Sidi Ahmad al-Badawī as a master or a saint — usually remains ambiguous for the followers.

V. Returning to the Western Desert of Egypt

I will now discuss the last case. The Bedouins of Egypt’s Western Desert (and in Cyrenaica of Libya¹⁹) distinguish between two social rankings: *ḥurr* (free) and *murābiṭ* (tied) [Akahori 2004; 2008; Peters 1990]. For example, the three dominant tribes in the Western Desert, ‘Alī al-Abyaḍ, ‘Alī al-Aḥmar, and al-Sinina, are called *Awlād ‘Alī* as a whole, and once controlled pastures and water sources when they lived a nomadic lifestyle. *Awlād ‘Alī*, along with their paternal cousin tribes in Cyrenaica, trace their ancestry to a woman named Sa‘āda. All her descendants are called *Sa‘ādī* and their status is *ḥurr*. Those who are not *Sa‘ādī* had to pay tributes²⁰ or provide labor to the *Sa‘ādī* in order to gain access to necessary natural resources, and thus had the lower status of *murābiṭ*.²¹ Anthropologists understand this situation in the framework of the patron-client relationship, and call tribes that have a lower status “client tribes” [Peters 1990].

However, some *murābiṭ* tribes were exempt from paying tributes and providing labor because their eponymous ancestors were saints. They are called *murābiṭīn khuḍrā* (green client tribes; green is a symbolic color of Islam) in the Western Desert and *murābiṭīn bil-baraka* (client tribes with grace) in Cyrenaica, while other client tribes whose ancestors were not saints are *murābiṭīn bayḍā* (white client tribes) and *murābiṭīn bil-ṣadaqa* (client

19 Cyrenaica (*Barqa* in Arabic) is the eastern half of Libya.

20 Most anthropologists including Murray [1935: 41], Evans-Pritchard [1949: 51], and Peters [1990: 42] adopted terms “tribute” or “fee” for this payment; its original word in Arabic is *ṣadaqa* or, in lesser cases, *jizya*.

21 Actually, some powerful non-Sa‘ādī tribes such as al-Jumī‘āt and al-Gaṭ‘ān in the Western Desert had effective control over their area without paying tributes or providing labor [Akahori 2004: 77–78].

tribes who pay tributes) [Evans-Pritchard 1949: 51–53; ‘Aṭaywa 1982: 110]. Tribes that descend from saints are usually very small and of lower status; however they are highly respected, even by *ḥurr* Bedouins, because people believe they maintain the grace (*baraka*) that God gave to their ancestors.

According to Murray [1935: 275], examples of saintly tribes include al-Fawākhīr, al-Jawābīs, and al-Sammālūs,²² however during my fieldwork I found these to be relatively large and that in fact much smaller ones exist. Some tribesmen from these groups, especially smaller ones, perform annual rituals called *bkā* (weeping) in which they sing a mourning chant about their ancestors beside their tombs, particularly on the anniversary of an ancestor’s death [Abu-Lughod 1986: 198–199].

A few of the tribes have other rituals called *ḥaḍra*, which they practice each week in a house or tent in the evening. In contrast to *bkā*, this ritual is open only to co-tribesmen, and outsiders are forbidden to approach the location, even if they are Bedouins. In December 2011, I was allowed to attend *ḥaḍra* for the first time on the condition that I do not bring a camera or recorder. I found that *ḥaḍra* is very similar to the *dhikr* meetings of Sufis. Male tribesmen formed a small circle and chanted songs that were sometimes sorrowful and slow, and elevated and quick at other times. These songs praised God, the Prophet Muḥammad, and their ancestors. After the songs, they moved their bodies according to fixed patterns of recitation such as “Yā Allāh,” or “Allāh ḥayy,” and then returned to chanting. If I had seen the same scene in a Sufi lodge, I would have assumed it was a Sufi ritual, and that the tribesmen were Sufis.

Perhaps this tradition was once a Sufi *dhikr* and the descendants who now practice it forgot its origin. However, for the tribesmen who had never seen Sufi rituals, it was nothing but an ancestral custom handed down from generation to generation. The attendees said they performed *ḥaḍra* to commemorate their ancestors, an action called *dhikrā al-judād* in Arabic.

This experience led me to consider viewing Sufi *dhikr* practices as rituals of saint veneration, rather than mystical training. If one considers the words of the followers of Sidi Aḥmad al-Badawī, my interpretation becomes easier to understand; the followers attended *dhikr* in remembrance (*dhikrā*) of God, the Prophet Muḥammad, and Sidi al-Badawī. This explanation can be compared to what tribesmen descended from saints said; they attended *ḥaḍra* in memory (*dhikrā*) of their ancestors. Such an interpretation could lead to anthropologists seeing Sufi *ṭarīqas* as a way of venerating saints, rather than for the purpose of spiritual training. These perspectives are not contradictory, but rather compatible with each other.

When studying the Sufi *ṭarīqa*, primary importance tends to be placed on spiritual training because it is considered one of the *ṭarīqa*’s main goals. Yet when discussing Sufi lodges, it is common to focus on their multiple uses as schools, hospitals, libraries,

22 al-Tāyib [1985: 270] asserts that the ancestor of al-Sammālūs is Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

accommodation centers, soup kitchens, and so forth. These functions might be additional to spiritual training, yet the fact that lodges serve various roles suggests that as an organization, the *ṭarīqa* is multi-functional for ordinary Sufi devotees and trainees.

VI. Conclusion

This paper reaffirms Tonaga's argument [2006] about the three-axis framework of Sufism: that the influence of each axis can grow or diminish, and that forms of Sufism exist which do not include popular beliefs. Similarly, I propose that forms of saint veneration exist which are not linked to Sufism. As I mentioned in the beginning of this paper, I believe that Sufism and saint veneration are essentially distinct phenomena, but they can also easily become part of a comprehensive Sufi practice and belief system. This dynamic view of Sufism and saint veneration demonstrates how the third axis (popular beliefs) can systematically become an integral part of Sufism. Regarding saint veneration, this perspective makes it possible to deal with Sufi saints and non-Sufi saints more consistently; furthermore, diverse rituals of veneration — as seen with *dhikr* in Tanta and *ḥaḍra* in the Western Desert — can be compared within that framework.

The idea explored in this paper still needs time to develop and must be verified through additional case studies from a variety of time periods and geographical areas. Anthropologists (including myself) have not done enough intensive research about how ordinary Sufis understand and practice their faith. Among the classical anthropological writings on Sufism, Evans-Pritchard [1949] linked his theory of the segmentary lineage system with the formation of Libyan nationalism via the Sanūsīya order's Sufi structure. Gilsenan [1973] deepened understanding of the influence of European modernity on Sufism with the case study of the Ḥāmidīya-Shādhilīya in Egypt. Their works contributed highly to anthropological studies of Sufism, but both were limited in scope, mainly in their focus on organizational forms of *ṭarīqa*. Crapanzano's analysis of the Ḥamadūshīya in Morocco [1973] provides some useful insights into the veneration-related aspects of Sufi organizations, although his study is limited to healing rituals and beliefs surrounding the spirit possession customs of the Ḥamadūshīya.²³

Recently, the number of anthropological works on Sufism is increasing [e.g. Ewing 1997; Spadola 2013], and in Japan, younger scholars such as Maruyama [2013 et al.] and Saito [2013 et al.] are tackling this theme. Many of them focus on the intellectual aspects of Sufism rather than devotional elements, which presumably reflects the gradual decline of Axis Z (popular beliefs) in modern times [Tonaga 2006: 14]. But, even now, there is still a lot of room to explore the veneration-related aspects of Sufism, as well as to pursue new

23 In the 1960s–70s, some other anthropologists suggested possible comparisons between Sufism and spirit possession [Kennedy 1967; Saunders 1977], which might be useful for understanding the religiosity of ordinary Sufis.

forms of saint veneration, which will be seen in religious tourism and the selling of religious commodities [e.g. Starrett 1995; Yasuda 2013].

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